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## AFTER ORTHODOXY—WHAT?

BY THE REV. MINOT J. SAVAGE, D.D.

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SOME years ago I wrote an article, which was published in this REVIEW, entitled "The Inevitable Surrender of Orthodoxy." The result was a deluge of newspaper articles, in both the religious and the secular press, and of letters from Oregon, Texas, Arkansas, the Carolinas and all over the land. It is nothing to the present purpose that many of these were ignorant and many more abusive. But what is very much to the purpose is this, that many of them expressed surprise that "a minister" could hold such opinions, and begged of me to tell them what I really did believe. I will indicate the tenor of one of them as representative.

The writer said, in substance, "I find myself agreeing with you in the main; but what surprises me is to see the '*Rev.*' attached to your name. I have been compelled to give up the old ideas, but from what I have been taught, and in view of the general opinion around me, I supposed I must give up *religion itself*. I have wanted to be religious, but have been told it was impossible unless I surrendered my reason. Pray tell me, therefore, what kind of religion you hold."

My purpose in this article, in answer to these questions, will be to show that religion is not dependent on orthodoxy, and that a grander religion remains when orthodoxy has passed away. For an interregnum of apparent irreligion, following on the decay of orthodoxy in many minds, who is responsible save orthodox teachers themselves? For they are constantly teaching that there is no religion possible except on the basis of their theories. Ought they to wonder if they are taken at their word?

But a change of theory, compelled by new and broader knowledge, abolishes no single fact or truth. It is only misconceptions that are left behind as the world advances. When the Ptolemaic theory of the universe was given up in favor of the Copernican,

none of the stars was put out, nor did they shine any the less brightly.

"Kopernik's thought a new world made,  
Though Ptolemy's stars still shone:  
New eyes a new religion gave,  
Yet not a truth was gone."

Theology is man's theory of the relations in which he stands to the power manifested in the universe. The field of religion is in the facts of this relation. A change of theory does not abolish any facts, any more than the change from Newton's to Young's theory of light interfered with the sun's power to give light to the earth. But, since what we shall try to be and to do, in order to get into right relations with God and with our fellow men, depends on our theory as to the nature of God and man, it is of the gravest practical importance that these theories be in accord with the facts.

Now, the essential features of the orthodox theory of religion have been discredited by the modern knowledge of the modern world. Since a similar thing has happened over and over in the past, it ought not to seem strange that it should happen again in a growing universe. The foundation stone of orthodoxy has always been the dogma of the Fall of Man and the consequent lost and ruined condition of the race. In accordance with this theory, the one great work of religion has been to "save" men from this "ruin." That has been the theory of the Fall—and in the light of **it** all the wrong and sorrow, the vice and crime of the world have been explained. But study of Jewish thought and life has shown that this whole Eden story was a late importation from a pagan people. The older prophets know nothing of it. And even Jesus, who is said to have been supernaturally sent to save us from the effects of the Fall, never makes the slightest allusion to it. Besides this, science has demonstrated that man has steadily risen from the first, and it makes all stories of original perfection impossible of belief, on the part of all free and intelligent people. And thus we are now able to explain the world's evil, vice, crime, suffering and death in the light of theories much more honorable to God and more helpful for man. Since orthodoxy is inextricably bound up with these theories, since she has committed herself to the assertion that they have been infallibly revealed, she must cease to be orthodox (*i. e.*, the "right opinion") now that these beliefs are passing away.

The only thing that is happening, then, is that the world is

growing wiser and better. And this should seem to be cause for rejoicing rather than of lamentation; unless people really hold the opinion of the old Scotch lady who said, "Some persons think everybody is going to be saved; but, for my part, I hope for better things."

I am now to outline what, in my opinion, is to follow orthodoxy—what is to be left after orthodoxy is gone. To be left? Why, this is one of those paradoxical cases where, after something is taken away, a good deal more is left than was possessed in the first place. It is as if some poor man's hands were emptied of pennies and filled with gold. It is as when the morning takes the night away from us. It is as when health drives out sickness, or hope dispossesses us of despair. The loss is only for the sake of larger and finer gain. We lose the pessimistic theories of a wrecked creation, a ruined race, total depravity, an angry God, blight, curse, endless and hopeless pain—that is all. We have left with us a grander God, a nobler man, a higher religion, a completer revelation, a more helpful Jesus, and eternal hope. Should I escape from an underground cavern, full of deadly damps and noisome creatures, up into God's free air, where His free winds blew on my face and the bright heavens arched a green and smiling earth, would it be altogether reasonable for me to sit down and bewail my "loss?" I should as soon think of doing so in the one case as in the other.

And yet the fear of many is not altogether strange. Sentiment and tender memories gather about the religion of father and mother and childhood, as vines and mosses overgrow an old ruin. The new home may be unspeakably better, yet we do not blame the immigrant when he drops a tear over the recollection of his fatherland. Yet had all men always stayed in fatherland, we should all have been barbarians still. Remember the old, then, if you will; but, if our hopes of God's Kingdom are ever to come true, new Abrahams must ever hear the new calls of God and set out for the new promised land.

Let us, then, note some of the main points of that theology that is to follow orthodoxy.

In the first place, religion will remain. It is infidelity, not faith—whether found outside of the church or in—which fears that religion is in danger. If religion *can* die, it *ought* to die. That is, if it is no part of the essential and eternal nature of

things, then it is something that is not necessary and can be spared. But it is essential and eternal. It consists in the relation between man and the power that lives and works in and through the universe. So long, then, as the universe lasts and there is a man in it, so long religion must endure. Theology is only somebody's theory of this relation. The theories may change; and, so far as they are incorrect or incomplete, they not only must but ought to change in the presence of larger knowledge. But this larger and truer knowledge of man and the universe cannot degrade theology or make it worse, unless the universe itself is essentially bad. If it is good, then the truth about it must be better than anybody's mistakes. So it is only infidelity, or lack of faith in God, that can really be afraid of finding out what is true. And since the universe is infinite and we are God's finite children, slowly growing, slowly finding out more and more about it, each new advance cannot fail to bring us nearer to the ever-lifting and ever-enlarging vision of the truth, which, being infinite, can never be wholly known. But, in the very nature of things, all new knowledge must issue in a nobler, higher, better religion. The only thing that truth can take away from us is a mistake; and the more mistakes we lose the richer we are. People forget this when they continually charge the preachers of the new revelation with doing nothing but telling "what they do not believe." Every truth-born denial is, and must be, a larger affirmation. Let people spend at least a part of their time in noting what is asserted.

Not only does religion remain, but God remains. Here again let it be fearlessly, though reverently, said that if God could be disproved He ought to be. They little honor Him who are afraid to have the grounds of their belief looked at. Do religious people really fear that it is all a mistake, that the universe is a sham and will not bear investigation? If God is not, surely we ought to know it. If God is, a sincere and serious looking for Him is what all really religious people ought to approve. Paul speaks, not without approbation, of those who are "feeling after God, if haply they may find Him who is *not far from every one of us*." And the proudest result of modern knowledge is the bringing of God nearer to us than ever before in all the past.

Modern science, so greatly feared, has, for the first time in the world's history, demonstrated the utter inadequacy of the ma-

terialistic theory, as an explanation of the universe. So we are justified in thinking of the universe as spirit and life all through. There is no longer any "dead" matter; all is thrilling with the one life. We no longer ask, "Where is God?" any more than I ask, "In what part of my body am I?" I am all in all; at the point of my pen when I write, in my hand when I stretch it out to help. As I am all in all parts of my body, so is God all and in all the universe. Never was God so near to us before; for natural forces are only His present working, and natural laws are only, so to speak, His habits, unchangeable only because He is all-wise. And since personality, intelligence and consciousness exist in man, and since the cause must be at least adequate to the effect, we know that God must be *as much as* personal, intelligent and conscious. What higher form of being may exist we do not know. God, then, is in the mightiest and most distant star; and equally He is in the grain of dust the wind whirls through its tiny orbit in the streets; He is in each blade of grass, and He is in the love and pity of the human heart. And, more than all these, He incloses them all in His infinite arms. He is so near that we lose Him; as a little child, lost in some corner of St. Peter's, might be asking for the Cathedral; or as a bird, borne on swift winds, might be seeking after the air.

Instead, then, of its being true that our modern knowledge is taking God away from us, it is, for the first time in history, giving us a thought of God worthy to match the newly discovered boundlessness of things.

Then, again, for the first time in the history of human thought, we have a conception of man that is worthy, inspiring and hopeful. A race once perfect in innocence, but now fallen and ruined; a race become morally incapable of all good; a race doomed to endless despair, except in the case of "the few that be saved," an "elect" company chosen to illustrate God's grace; a race living in age-long rejection of divine truth and goodness, and so drifting down the hopeless rapids to the abyss; such is the picture presented to us in all the old creeds. But now what? A race starting, indeed, on the border line of the animal world, but with what a history and what an outlook! Along a pathway of struggle and tears and blood, ever up and on, sloughing off the animal, climbing to brain and heart and conscience, until figures like Buddha and Jesus stand up out of the darkness! Legislators

and singers and artists and discoverers and inventors and scientists and teachers and martyrs and witnesses, a long line of the great and the good, increasing with every age, testify not the fall but the magnificent ascent of the race! From what low beginnings come, until we have at last the right to cry, "Now are we sons of God; and it does not yet appear what we shall be!" In face of a history like this, I do not envy the man who can sneer at Darwinism as irreligious and find more "piety" in a theory that makes us all "children of hell." With a past like this behind us, what is there we may not aspire to in the future? A perfect "kingdom of God" becomes a perfectly reasonable dream. Every new truth discovered is just so much more known of God; and every new and higher adjustment of the individual or social life to the higher truths is one more step in the eternal ascent of religion toward God.

And Jesus? Is He lost to the religious heart of the world? Rather is He, for the first time, found. On the old theory, He is part of a supernatural irruption into the world's natural order. In some exceptional, incomprehensible way He is God, He is man, He is both, He is neither. As God, His supposed suffering we cannot think of as real. And His "example" cannot help us who, on that theory, are not "divine," and so are not like him. What good is an example beyond our sphere and out of our reach? But now even the old churches are beginning to talk of Him as only "a manifestation of God in the sphere of humanity," and to waive questions as to the Trinity. Yes, we can join them in this. Only we must look on all men and women as manifestations of God, so far as they are good and true. So it comes to be a question of degree only, and no longer one of kind. God is incarnate in all things good and fair—in flowers and mountains, as well as in the beauty and grandeur of human character.

Looking at Jesus, then, as thus incarnating God in a purely natural way, and so as a natural outgrowth of "what is in man," He becomes to us no longer a symbol of a lost world, but a magnificent inspiration, as showing what man is capable of. Now He is an example and a hope. So He becomes "Son of God" and "our elder brother," as He never could be before.

Neither, once more, is the Bible lost to a man who is capable of seeing the grander revelation of God. The critical scholar rejects no claim that the Bible ever makes. It nowhere claims

to be infallible. This is only a claim, made on behalf of certain theories about it, by certain men who have proved themselves to be very far from infallible. So that now the free and fearless student is no longer troubled by any supposed necessity of "explaining" mistakes, of "reconciling" contradictions, or of "apologizing" for imperfect moral teachings. These are "difficulties" with which men have saddled the Bible, but which are no part of it.

All truth now is only so much "revelation." The truth in the Bible is "divine" truth; and so is the truth of any other book. As all our light is sunlight—whether it comes to us through the medium of a wood-fire, of gas, of electricity, or of a gem dug up from the earth—so is all truth from God, the one source of all light. The Bible then becomes the natural product of the religious nature of man, reflecting its different stages of growth, and so, full of instruction and inspiration for those who know how to use it.

And the Church? Is that to fade away? Rather is it to become grander than ever before. Men naturally organize themselves about any great human interest, for the carrying out of purposes which cannot be so well attained alone. So we have art associations, scientific societies, governments and educational institutions. Now, since religion is a natural interest of man, the one thing of supreme importance, religious organization is the most natural thing in the world. The first churches were purely natural, human associations of those who wished to lead a special kind of religious life, and to help each other in attaining their common aims.

Of course, the type of church, its particular aims and methods, these will always depend on the prevailing theory that is held concerning God, concerning man, concerning the relations which actually exist between them, and concerning what ought to be done to correct and perfect those relations. For all churches exist to help men into better relations with God. This means teaching the truth of those relations and urging motives for right action.

It will easily be seen, then, that the field and need for such association are as permanent as human life. The foundation of the Church then is eternal—based in the nature and needs of man. It will also be easily seen that the nearer we come to an apprehension of the truth of things, the nobler and grander must



the Church become. And, further, it will be seen that, so long as the Church works on a false theory, so long and so far its labor must be wasted.

And, lastly, the outlook for humanity, both in this world and in the future, was never so hopeful as it is in the light of the new knowledge of the modern world. We have the means in our own hands for making this old earth a paradise. And, as finite children of the infinite God, we may believe that we shall find death only another birth.

After Orthodoxy, then, is it darkness and despair—a being “without God and without hope in the world?” Rather do the pessimism and despair of Orthodoxy fade away, as the darkness before a rising sun, and leave us in a world containing a nobler religion, a grander God, a more hopeful man, a more helpful Jesus, a more comprehensive Bible, a better Church and a more inspiring destiny.

MINOT J. SAVAGE.